



NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

- A silent epidemic of oral disease is affecting our most vulnerable citizens including poor children, the elderly, and many members of racial and ethnic minority groups.
- In 2003, Americans spent an estimated \$74 billion on dental services, yet many children and adults still go without regular dental services and other measures that have been proven effective in preventing oral disease.
- Almost 25% of children 6 to 17 years of age and 30% of adult Americans have untreated tooth decay. Children of some racial and ethnic groups continue to experience far greater rates of untreated decay. Both African-American children and Mexican-American children have twice the amount of untreated decay as white children.
- More than 100 million Americans lack the proven benefits of fluoridated water.
- Dental sealants applied to children's teeth can prevent tooth decay, yet less than 25% of children—less than 5% in certain low-income groups—have had sealants.
- More than 8,000 people, mostly older Americans, die from oral and pharyngeal cancers each year—nearly one person every hour. This year, 28,260 new cases of oral cancer will be diagnosed.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

With funds from CDC's Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion appropriations, CDC works with 12 states and 1 territory to build effective oral health prevention programs and reduce disparities among disadvantaged populations. This effort includes working with states to develop school-based or school-linked programs to reach children at high risk of oral disease with proven and effective education and prevention services, such as dental sealants. CDC also works with states to expand the fluoridation of community water systems and operates a fluoridation training and quality assurance program. CDC works with states to track oral diseases and provide valuable health information to assess the effectiveness of disease prevention programs and help target those programs to populations at greatest risk. CDC assesses the risk of infectious disease transmission in dental care settings and provides nationally recognized guidance to minimize the risk of disease transmission in dental offices.

Example of Program in Action

With grant assistance from CDC, Nevada has made significant progress in expanding the number of communities with fluoridated water. CDC funds helped the water utility in Clark County, Nevada, which has a population of 1 million primarily in Las Vegas and Henderson, to purchase some of the equipment needed to implement water fluoridation. This increased the population in Nevada with access to water fluoridation from 28,000 to 1 million residents, or about two-thirds of the state population served by public water systems. With funding from a current CDC Cooperative Agreement, Nevada also is working to strengthen its capacity to monitor oral diseases, further extend water fluoridation, and provide dental sealants to children through school-based services.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC plans to fund up to 10 additional states to enhance their current oral health programs, and will continue to work with states to assess the extent of oral diseases; target prevention programs and resources to those at greatest risk; and evaluate changes in policies, programs, and oral disease. This effort includes implementing water fluoridation in additional communities and improving use of sealants through school programs. CDC plans to work to reduce disparities in oral cancers and oral diseases, such as periodontal disease, that are linked to chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease and risk factors such as tobacco use.

For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit www.cdc.gov/program

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